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to the special session of the General Assembly entitled**

**“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference addresses issues of national and global social justice and equity through the lens of the African-American faith tradition. The Conference is ecumenical and interdenominational, providing clergy and lay leadership capacity-building and networking strategies for lay individuals and congregations to serve and transform their communities. Our mission is to nurture, sustain and mobilize the African-American faith community, in collaboration with civic, corporate and philanthropic leaders, to address the critical need for human and social justice within local, national and global communities.

We seek to strengthen the individual and collective capacity of thought leaders and activists in the church, academia and community through education, advocacy and activism. Our outreach and partnerships include interfaith and interethnic networks. Our membership is intentionally intergenerational and we seek to develop strong linkages between seasoned faith leaders, students and emerging leaders who are committed to justice work. We have had an impact on millions of faith leaders directly through education and advocacy as well as extended partnerships.

We are concerned about the growing gap between the privileged and the poor in the United States of America and trends and patterns of racial marginalization and dehumanization of women, children and communities of colour.

To be sure, the role and accountability of donor nations in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals must also be examined, not just in terms of financial contributions, but also the manner in which they internally model and export policies that affirm or are contrary to the spirit and goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Addressing the intersection of gender equality and poverty reduction is key to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Also key are the will and financial resources of nations to implement strategies for sustained success that are proven and targeted.

In the United States, ongoing gender and racial inequality hamper sustained progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Presented herein are three examples of this phenomenon that have a significant impact on the status of women, particularly women of colour, in the United States. For example, with 66 per cent of low-income African-American children living in single mother-headed households, the combined factors of race, gender and economic location greatly affect the lives of poor women and children in the United States.

Hunger and unemployment

Goals 1 and 3 of the Millennium Development Goals specifically target poverty and hunger. Although the degree of extreme hunger experienced by different people varies, in 2012, nearly 50 million people in the United States were characterized as living with food insecurity or hunger. Between 2002 and 2012, the overall poverty rate in the United States rose from 12.1 to 15.0 per cent. However, for African-Americans and Latinos, poverty rates increased from 24.1 to 27.2 per cent and from 21.8 to 25.6 per cent, respectively. The child poverty rate for the nation rose from 16 per cent in 2002 to 21.8 per cent in 2012. For African-Americans and Latinos, child poverty rates increased from 32.3 to 36.7 per cent and from 28.6 to 33.8 per cent, respectively. These figures are linked to the reality of high unemployment. During the same period, the overall unemployment rate rose

from 5.8 to 8.1 per cent. For African-Americans and Latinos, it increased from 10.2 to 14.0 percent and from 7.5 to 10.2 per cent, respectively. In addition, while women make up over 50 per cent of the retail workforce in the United States, most of them work in the lowest wage jobs and many are working part-time, not by choice but because employers benefit from a part-time workforce. At minimum wage, a McDonald's worker would have to work 74 hours per week to earn a basic living wage. The average Wal-Mart employee would have to work 785 years to earn the equivalent of the annual salary of the company's chief executive officer. In general, women in the United States still earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by men.

Racialized and militarized policing and mass incarceration

In respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, annexed to General Assembly resolution 45/111, the United States has become a nation in chains. There are now some 9 million people in the United States either in prisons, in halfway houses or on parole, a majority of whom are people of colour. Although a majority of those are men, African-American and Latino women in the United States are 2.5 and 1.5 times more likely, respectively, than white women to be imprisoned. Entire family networks are affected by the incarceration of individuals: for example, women and children suffer greatly when men in their families are imprisoned and deprived of opportunities to support their families.

The eyes of the world have been on the United States as it struggles with racialized and militarized policing and the attendant racialized criminal justice system that have led to mass incarceration. The spotlight on Ferguson, Missouri, as a locus of racialized and militarized policing has revealed only one example of the deep and systemic issues that have an impact on human rights and family stability within the borders of the United States.

It has been reported that, on average, three legal warrants have been issued per household in Ferguson. In response to police shootings, the young people of that community have committed to fighting back against perceived and real race-based oppression. Many of those in leadership and on the ground are school-age girls, women, mothers and grandmothers who have decided that enough is enough.

Water as a human right

The importance of adequate access to clean sources of water to achieving the Millennium Development Goals was acknowledged in General Assembly resolution 64/299. In spite of this, in 2014, thousands of residents of Detroit, Michigan, faced having their access to running water at home cut off owing to their inability to pay their water bills. A judge ruled that although "water is a necessary ingredient to sustaining life", residents nevertheless had no "enforceable right" to water and that the city needed the revenue. This situation affects the poorest, most vulnerable and weakest members of the community and sets a precedent that can only lead to the further dehumanization of marginalized communities of colour.

It is impossible to seriously address gender inequities related to education, health and employment in communities in the United States in which access to water as a human right is being challenged. Further questions arise when one

considers the relationship of access to water to spatial inequities in land use and to the privatization of water for profit.

When families, children and elders have to worry about access to clean water or about having any water at all, this impedes their ability to maintain healthy environments and to prepare for effective participation at school or in the workplace. When the access of poor people to water is at the whim of private interests, the commodification of this natural resource will have spillover effects on the international community.

Conclusion

We have highlighted these pressing issues in the belief that the disparate impact of race on people of colour in the United States will only create greater barriers to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals in the United States and, consequently, weaken the will of developing nations to adhere to the word and the spirit of the Millennium Declaration. These issues have disproportionate impacts on women and children, the young and old, and require internal and external attention to ensure that the human dignity of all is respected. Donor nations and “developed” nations must adhere to the same standards of accountability to which other nations are being held and must not ignore the increasing disparities and the disrespect for the humanity of all that occur in the world’s wealthiest nation.

Recommended question

Although contributions from the United States and other developed nations support the success of the Millennium Development Goals, the Goals do not call upon donor nations to address serious disparities within their own borders. How can and will the Government of the United States ensure that its internal policies and the influence of its multinationals, which are exported to other parts of the world, are held to standards of accountability that are consistent with the Millennium Development Goals and the Millennium Declaration?

Recommendation

We recommend the establishment of one or more independent bodies of inquiry to review statistics and conditions related to the intersection of racism and to address issues and strategies to achieve gender equality in the United States. Such inquiries be should be carried out with the full participation of non-governmental organizations to further the shared commitments to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals as they relate to the status of women and to the global community.
